Post-LSA biographical sketches

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Tribute to André Bekerman

Comrade André Bekerman succumbed to a two-year battle with cancer on June 7, 1999. André regarded himself as a revolutionary socialist, and his life in many respects represented the evolution of many of the youth revolutionaries of his generation. Before becoming a union organizer and senior negotiator for the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), he had come in contact with the Canadian Trotskyist movement in Toronto — led by the worker-intellectual Ross Dowson. André became a member of the youth wing, Young Socialists/Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes (YS/LJS), and later the adult branch, League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière (LSA/LSO).

He was born in 1943 in Brussels, Belgium. Because his father was a Polish Jew, his family lived a fearful existence. André was fond of recounting that he had experienced his first anti-fascist action in 1945 when some Nazi officers, attempting to evacuate in a vehicle, had accosted his mother pushing André in a carriage to get directions out of Belgium. She slyly directed them to the arriving Canadian troops.

I met him in late 1964 when he was a University of Toronto student leader in the Student Union for Peace Action during the demonstrations in solidarity with U.S. Black voters who were attempting to assert their civil rights. As a political novice, I listened carefully to the eloquent and decisive voices who were attempting to create a united and coherent militant strategy in the midst of chaotic and turbulent discussions that typified the "new left". André, David Hemblen, and Dierdre Gallagher (André's first wife) stirred me into action. It is because of them that I came to reject the sectarian snipes against the Trotskyists — when I found out that they were all members of the YS/LJS. And it was because of them that I eventually joined up.

André had a charismatic presence even then. When he rose to speak, others listened. He was quick to demonstrate leadership in action: as a volunteer to help harvest sugar cane in Cuba (for which he received the distinction of being a model worker) and as a lead marshall in a huge demonstration to commemorate the bombing of Hiroshima.

Impatient with the middle class student milieu and with a taste for militant, class action, he dropped out of the English literature program at U. of T. and started out on a career of working and involvement in unions — beginning with a job digging a tunnel for Toronto's University subway line in 1965. He led a successful fight to have the Toronto Transit Commission mount a public memorial plaque to honor the sacrifices made by the tunnel workers.

He remained a member of the LSA/LSO until the early 1970's, during which time he involved himself in such movements as those against the Vietnam War and in solidarity with Cuba. Eventually, he dropped his formal affiliation to the Marxist organization, but remained sympathetic.

In the 34 years that he served in the labor movement, he occupied the roles of organizer, education officer, and negotiator. He worked in turn for the Labourer's Union, the Canadian Union of Operating Engineers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Communication Workers, the United Garment Workers, the International Woodworkers, and OPSEU (since 1980). In these roles, he focussed his energy and talents for organizing in a syndicalist direction. He remained a militant, but one who became increasingly influenced by the imperatives of collective bargaining in organizations seeking reform not revolution. André always sought to get the best collective

agreements for his membership using solidarity and discipline on the picket line. Regrettably, it was he to whom the task fell to negotiate the surrendering of OPSEU's previous gains in the Social Contract negotiations. Along similar lines, he expressed criticism of the Canadian Auto Workers' refusal to participate in co-management with the employers.

Naturally, the contradictions of his union role taxed his patience: so he turned his restless mind to a new passion — archaeology. He sat on the board of trustees at the Royal Ontario Museum for the past six years. He liked the excavation trips to places like Cuba and Greece and he took a socialist's pleasure in uncovering facets of collective life. After obtaining his master's degree in Archaeology from U. of T. in 1998 and despite the debilitating effects of his cancer, he embarked on a doctorate.

His life ended in a combination of struggle and optimism. For this, his memory is an inspiration to his legion of friends in the labor and socialist movements. At the Steelworkers' Hall memorial on June 11, which ended in the singing of *The Internationale*, I was lifted by the spirit of open identification with the class struggle and by the hundreds of participants that packed the meeting. The audience was composed of his surviving family, a CBC broadcaster, an official of the Royal Ontario Museum, trade union officials, an NDP member of the Ontario legislature, a former federal NDP MP, old comrades, and rank-and-file unionists. The stories that were told expressed admiration for the radical and socialist aspects of his life. Ours is not to mourn, ours is to organize and carry on the struggle for a socialist future.

By Gord Doctorow, secondary school teacher and branch president in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Salute to a Fallen Comrade

John Robert Glenn passed away at the age of 81 owing to complications from surgery. John was suffering from cancer and artery blockage and had been in a state of decline for many years. He finally succumbed on September 22, 2017.

John had been a socialist (Trotskyist) and a stalwart of the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere (LSA/LSO) since the early 1960s and later the Socialist League and the Forward Group.

John had become an expert on the history of the Philippines, and that historical perspective led him to a Master's and Ph.D. He leaves his Philippina-Canadian wife, Carmen and three sons, John Jr., William and Jeremy. John was married to his wife, Carmen, for over 48 years after a three year courtship. She was his loving caregiver for several years as John's health slowly declined.

John's history with the Canadian socialist movement includes the time when he was unjustly fired from his job as Principal at the Coboconk Public School in mid-north Ontario in the 1960s. Apparently, his picture was attached to a Toronto newspaper article which cited him as a participant in an anti-war march. The conservative elders on the school board in the Town of Coboconk decided to fire him for engaging in such conduct which they deemed unethical. However, little did they know about John's combative and resolute nature. Soon, a campaign of protest and solidarity developed in support of John, which saw the renowned mathematician, philosopher, and antiwar leader, Bertrand Russell, protest the termination of John's appointment on political grounds. A copy of Russell's protest was published in the Toronto Star. Such was John's capacity for extending his influence.

John's interest in politics developed quickly in the early 1960s. He went to Cuba on a tour with three Canadian activists and they published their account

of what they witnessed in a pamphlet called "Four Canadians who saw Cuba". This pamphlet, which included John's insightful report, can still be found in archives in universities across Canada.

Subsequently, John became a principal at a school on the Six Nations Reserve in Brantford. For many years, John also made himself available to be a substitute teacher for the Toronto Board of Education. He was an active member of the OSSTF, Occasional Teachers' Local as well as an activist in the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario in which he led struggles to democratize his local.

John was active in defence of equal rights for women including a woman's right to abortion. He supported gay rights and human rights struggles. He was opposed to racism and anti-Indigenous prejudices. He was an activist in the NDP which he saw as the party of the workingclass in Canada and was a member of its provincial council in Ontario for many years. In addition, he travelled to the Philippines where he also studied for two years at university and made contacts with socialist and workers' struggles there, sending informative articles to his comrades in Toronto. He was also lovingly accepted by Carmen's family while in the Philippines.

John's involvement with the Young Socialists/Ligue Des Jeunes Socialistes, the youth group associated with the LSA/LSO and his decades of political activities started in the early 1960s. John was then a student at the Glendon campus where he was focusing his interest on history to the extent of even taking five history courses in one term. John's interest in history reflected his profound identity with the unsung heroes of the past, those overlooked when history is written by the elites who believe great men control human fate. John's interest in history made him a repository of a mass of the important details and events that filled in the broad strokes of social studies and socialist theory for his comrades and friends. One of the highlights of his 1965 academic year was a

debate John organized between Ross Dowson, the leader of the League, and the head of the Social Science department at Glendon who was a geographical determinist. I don't think I need to tell you who won the debate.

John's academic pursuits involved getting a B.A. from Glendon Campus at York University, a Master's degree from the State University of New York in Buffalo and a PH.D. from the State University of Illinois near Chicago. His PH.D focussed on the exploitation of the Philippines by imperialist powers during the civil war in that country. When John was attending university in Buffalo, he drove to his classes from Ontario three times a week while holding a job here. At the State University of Illinois, he received a scholarship and a financial bursary which acknowledged his status as a serious and talented scholar. He chose this university because it was only one of two universities that had a program in South East Asian studies. When I attended York University in 1965, John was my political comrade and mentor. He introduced me to well-regarded and published professors and other senior academics who clearly held him in high esteem.

John read newspapers avoraciously. For many, many years, John had a habit of mailing newspaper clippings that he thought would be of interest to his various compatriots on a regular basis with his own comments written on them. His insights were keen, original and reflected a mind that made connections rarely visible to others.

John possessed a quiet determination that kept him politically active for close to 50 years. He had a manner about him that was affable, unpretentious, gentle, positive, even shy, and occasionally withdrawn, but always firm and insightful. He reduced the most complex insights to simple common sense observations. He always had a powerful instinct of solidarity with everyone who was cast aside and marginalized by the dominant privileged few at the top of the social ladder. He never ever looked down on anybody. He was a loving

father of three boys that he was deeply proud of for good reason and a husband to the family tower of strength, Carmen.

John also had a sense of humour that was occasionally biting but reflected the irony he saw in the events that he lived through and the people he shared his life with. He was a warm, empathetic and personable human being. The material possessions that so many people spend their lives chasing meant less to him than an evening of lively conversation. He was a militant trade unionist, a political historian, an internationalist, an academic, an educator, a comrade in arms and a party builder while his physical strength hung on. His solidarity with all humanity was unlimited. He had a remarkable ability to zero in on and identify persons who were looking for and needed support and guidance and to provide it to them. He never looked down on anyone. His humanity and "people skills" became apparent to anyone who was involved in one-on-one conversation with him.

John was lucky in life to have met Carmen who stood by him as a companion, a spouse and later in life, his totally dedicated caregiver. She provided him with an environment where he could continue to read and think deep thoughts despite medical and mobility issues. He was deeply influenced by Carmen whose family of educated and motivated contributors to society embraced John fully, both in Canada and in the Philippines. He is one of the very few people I know who ended up being married not only once but twice—one time for Carmen's Filipino family in the Philippines and one time in Canada. John's adaptability and openness to other cultures—especially Carmen's—was critical to his decision to do his doctorate on South East Asian and Philippine history. John's three children gave him added joy in his personal life. John Jr., Billy and Jeremy inherited many of John's good qualities and each of them has achieved much in their lives. They have done him honour.

Wayne Roberts, a Woodrow Wilson scholar and a strong-willed political activist advises that it was John Glenn's persistence and tenacity that persuaded him, over several conversations, to join the League for Socialist Action. John Riddell, a comrade, recalls a protest at Old City Hall in Toronto in which John participated. John wrote: "The protestors got on the cops' nerves so they rounded them up and started to boost them into their paddy wagons. Totally unfazed, John cried out, "Fill the jails! Fill the jails!" When John was booked, he gave his name as Richard Lovelace. I don't know if any of the fuzz got the point. It was Richard Lovelace who wrote, 'Iron bars do not a prison make.'"

John's unassuming and accommodating nature belied his deep convictions. On one occasion, at a convention of the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, he was physically excluded by a union bureaucrat from the convention floor for handing out leaflets calling for more democratic structures in the Union. He launched a lawsuit against that bureaucrat and used it to mobilize support and educate the membership about the importance of union democracy.

I know that some people portray their opinions through bull horns and loud proclamations of what is right or wrong. John had a different style. John advanced his views by asking questions, getting the conversants to consider the validity of their own assumptions and more often than not, he got them to understand and accept his own premises. He was a master of the Socratic method. His was a soft but effective way of winning others to appreciate his own opinions.

I met John in 1963 at a point in my life where his knowledge, perspective and advice helped to shape my own path in a difficult world which cries for change and improvement. John taught me that the truth whispered is louder than the lie shouted. John was a common man with an uncommon sensibility whose friendship and understanding helped me achieve whatever I have been able to

do with whatever limited skills I have, to make this a better world. I am sure that he had the same affect on dozens of others whose paths in life crossed with his. I know that the depth of feeling and pride and joy that John had for his family, his wife, his sons, his five grandchildren was without limit.

If socialists are called upon to carry a particle of the future of humanity on their shoulders for the benefit of future generations, the particle that John carried was outsized. John, your chuckle, your good humour, your ironclad logic, your practicality, your modesty and your moral strength will shine in our memories forever. We salute your memory and rededicate ourselves to bring your dreams of a world full of care and solidarity and emancipation to fruition.\

Harry Kopyto

COMMENTS REGARDING JIM MITCHELL

Jim had a lot of talents and was the type of person who would not let them waste away without using them. I want to just say a few words briefly about this extraordinary being who exhibited a tremendous amount of energy, insight and commitment as part of the revolutionary socialist movement at its darkest hour during the 1950s in the era of McCarthyism and repression of the radical movement.

Jim played a special role for many years as part of the connective tissue that linked cumulative experience of the Canadian Trotskyist movement during the 1940s and 1950s with the youth radicalization of the 1960s. At the time when the movement was relatively isolated, and was declining as a political force, it was left with a largely marginalized role during these dog days Jim Mitchell played a central role in keeping the organized movement together as an organizer and educator with a deep grasp of the critical tactical judgment needed to play an effective role during those years.

Following the rupture of the Fourth International in the early 1950s between the Pabloite forces and the SWP, the Canadian movement suffered a significant split and went into decline. As it slowly resuscitated, still weak and small, Jim Mitchell played a central role along with a few other comrades including Ken Sutherland, Ross Dowson, Paddy Stanton, Pat Mitchell and others in keeping the movement functioning. At various times, Jim Mitchell was a leading activist in the Socialist Educational League and later the League for Socialist Action. At various times, he was the editor of the Workers Vanguard, he participated in the daily work of the branch including giving educationals, writing, joining in cross-country tours including the 1966 tour. He was a member of the Socialist Educational League's political committee and participated in all the important discussions within the movement on a wide variety of political questions. Later as the movement came back to life, at major social events of the movement, we could also count on the Jim Mitchell trio to provide enjoyable live music to the comrades and contacts of the movement. Jim also did a lot of construction work at Camp Poundmaker when the camp was being built and lived on site preparing it. Camp Poundmaker eventually became a central place for conferences and summer events for our comrades and contacts throughout

Ontario and Quebec. Jim objected to the decision to sell the camp.

Although Jim ceased being active in the movement in the early 1960s, and pursued his career as a professional musician, he frequently attended movement activities where he met several of the newer and younger comrades and remained in solidarity with its central tenets.

There was a later time when Jim Mitchell re-engaged in political activity. In the early 1970s, he joined over 30 other comrades in establishing the Socialist League after the League for Socialist Action suffered an unfortunate demise under the impact of ultra-left tendencies that dominated the youth and student radicalization. Jim Mitchell's support for the Socialist League reflected his profound understanding of the central importance of the New Democratic Party as a labour party to the class struggle in Canada and to orient to it.

Jim's support for those of us who formed the Socialist League under the leadership of Ross Dowson were inspired and gratified by his solidarity.

I have made these comments about Jim because those of us in the Forward Group which includes John Darling and Gord Doctorow see him as a key part of our ongoing socialist tradition and an inspiration to our current political activity. Without comrade Jim Mitchell and a handful of other comrades like him, there would have been a complete disruption and no continuity with the traditions of Trotskyism and the lessons learned about the radicalization of the late 1960s. I and others were able to play a political role since that time because of Jim's and his fellow comrades committment to his ideas, his energy, his insight, his optimism and his wide range of skills and abilities that he put at the service of history.

Recently an old friend and comrade, Arnie Mintz, passed away. He was brought down by a combination of MS and Parkinson's disease. Arnie's dying was a moment of great sadness for me personally. We had lived and worked together in 1969 as organizers for the League for Socialist Action (LSA) in Winnipeg. The LSA was the Canadian section of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. We were two very young, Toronto born and raised radicals, entirely focused on the job at hand. We established a LSA branch in Winnipeg and a Young Socialist (YS) local. We also worked successfully in Saskatchewan. Our job was to spread the vision of Trotskyism, Internationalism and of World Revolution. For the period of time that we worked together it was a successful and rewarding partnership. We achieved the short-term goals that we set out to accomplish.

Living and sharing a space with Arnie was a real challenge for me as I am sure that living with me was for him. Roommates share some of the characteristics of newlyweds as you begin to shape your living space. Arnie and I, as is typical of most young men, were slobs of the highest order. We mostly argued about where we were going to pile our stacks of unwashed clothes and who would remove the moldy food from the fridge. Neither of us had any money and both of us were serious carnivores, we became quite able in our ability to massage capitalism in such a way that, not only did we eat well, but we were able to entertain prospective recruits over dinner. We were ruthless. Shouting the slogan "By Any Means Necessary" we filled the larder.

Shortly before I left Winnipeg. We got the boot from our apartment. The caretaker, who managed the block, was an odious creep and the comings and goings of so many strange looking people, raised his suspicious nature. He unjustly evicted us. I was mad, Arnie was incensed. Arnie devised a plan of revenge. We had an extra and mostly unused room, except for the odd travelling comrade, in the apartment. Under Manitoba law the caretaker was obliged to give us a months notice. Arnie determined that heretofore the extra room was to be the "garbage room". All garbage, especially rotting vegetable manner, was to be dumped in the room and the room sealed. For the entire month we followed this path. I was constantly in fear that some new life form was

going to jump out and devour us whenever we unsealed the door to add to the pile. We survived the monster from the deep and left the apartment on a high note.

My next assignment was in Halifax and during that short period I rarely saw Arnie. We would run into each other occasionally in Toronto. Following the work in Halifax I moved back to Toronto where for about a year we hung out whenever possible. During this time I got together with Ava and Arnie was often the third plate at the table. He was going through his late Holden Caulfield period and his search was often a mixture of comedy and tragedy. This coincided exactly with the emergence of the women's movement inside the LSA and this phenomenon was entirely up front and strident. We were all male chauvinists, (which was in reality more than true) and marriage became a taboo. Ava and I got married and really pissed off a lot of people. Arnie struggled with the love question.

By the early seventies the LSA was a strong political force within the framework of the Canadian left. There were LSA branches and YS locals across the entire country, almost every major centre had a branch. In Quebec, we had a presence that was considerable. We published a weekly paper and did well planned political work within the Women's, Anti-War, Student and Trade Union Movements. We were crude in many ways, the level of political understanding within the organization was entirely uneven, but despite all, we were the most dynamic force on the left. This dynamism alone attracted potential cadre. Hundreds of new people joined us between 1969 and 1972.

In retrospect, we should have been much more cautious in recruiting uneducated persons to the organization. We recruited the best activists because we were right there with them in the struggle. They joined for the best of reasons. We were growing for the first time in decades and we really got excited and we recruited new members most often before they were really ready. The organization felt like we had collectively swallowed a growth hormone and we had become addicted to the pills.

The new comrades were not Trotskyists in the sense that they really

understood the differences between the CP and us. Without understanding where we had come from historically, their basis for making judgements concerning how we operated externally or internally was entirely without values. The concept of a Leninist organization was something that was entirely foreign to most of the new comrades. The methodology of the LSA was an attempt to operate within the traditions of Bolshevism or at least our understanding of what that meant. In time, some of them learned politics but most of them eventually disappeared. The uneducated were the easiest to manipulate and eventually the LSA leadership relied on this unschooled core group to fight against the opposition in the organization. An ironic historical comparison is the way that Stalin's support in the CPSU came from the flood of people that joined the party after the October Revolution and not from the old Bolsheviks.

The LSA in the early seventies was like a Roman Candle, fifteen hundred people exploding in a beautiful array of colour and then, the darkness fell.

In 1971 real political differences emerged within the LSA and I moved purposely back to Winnipeg. Arnie took the trip to Winnipeg with Ava and me, the three of us, all of our stuff including two cats jammed into a Toyota heading west. The trip was a riot, certainly one of the most memorable automotive adventures that I've ever been on. Arnie made a speech to the assembled patrons of the Shell restaurant in Kakabeka Falls Ontario on the decline of capitalism based on the size of a miniscule scoop of ice cream he had received with dinner. I remember this scene and Arnie's humour as if it were yesterday. The shock on the faces of the other patrons was only matched by my own. The laughter hurt.

In Winnipeg the majority of the comrades were in sympathy with my view that Canadian nationalism on the left was an anathema. There was a development within the Canadian Social Democracy, the NDP, of a New Left current called "The Waffle" that was supposedly anti-imperialist but in fact was simply anti-American. The rhetoric was left wing but the politics were essentially disguised bourgeois nationalism.

The leadership of the LSA began to orient to this grouping and in doing so they began to politically capitulate to the nationalist orientation. Ross Dowson, the venerable leader of the LSA really misunderstood the implications and potential dynamics of the "French Turn" and lived and died by the slogan "Win the NDP to Socialism". Rather than bring internationalism to the Waffle, they politically tailed those rotten villains. This was not the "nationalism" present in a war of national liberation such as in Vietnam, this was the "Nationalism" of a petty-bourgeois, consciously anti-Leninist grouping. The LSA began spouting Canadian Nationalism and we were well on the road to national chauvinism.

For those of us in the LSA that bought internationalism as a philosophical and political cornerstone of everything we believed and had worked for, this development was astounding. The LSA leadership that was capitulating to nationalism was, in large part, the same people who had recruited and politically educated the cadre of the organization. We felt betrayed.

I well remember that as a callow youth of fifteen, while being recruited to the Young Socialists, the explanation of Democratic Centralism that was offered. "It's a team effort" I was told. "We argue strategy and line internally, but externally we present a common view". "We work politically as a publicly united group". It was explained that the internal discussion was a model of democratic discussion with minorities guaranteed the right to present their views to the entire membership. The power of Democratic Centralism was that the majority view prevailed, the organization would publicly present a common line and that during the next pre-convention period any question of line, orientation or strategy was up for discussion, review and possible alteration. It seemed like a good idea so I joined up.

It was with this belief in the democratic norms of the organization, that the Winnipeg comrades formed a "tendency" for the period of the pre-convention discussion. The Revolutionary Communist Tendency (RCT), what a stroke of romanticism. Forming a tendency like the RCT was well within the methodology that was historically accepted within

the LSA. The right to form such a body within the organization and the methodology, by which the discussion would be held, was supposedly set in stone.

I want here to distinguish the difference between a "tendency" and a "faction". Simply a tendency is established for the purposes of a specific discussion and a faction is established because those comrades feel the leadership itself needs to be replaced. Factionalists essentially believe that the political differences are of such a nature, that nobody who believes (insert whatever) should constitute the leadership of the organization. Long term factionalism within an organization is of course, a guarantee of disaster.

The comrades in the RCT prepared a document on the national question. For all of us, it was our first go at preparing a document of this nature. Even I, the guy who had been around the longest, had never before been part of a formal tendency out to change the line. In every sense, we constituted a disciplined and loyal to the organization, grouping. We were not out to change the leadership, we were out to change the line on one question. We were naïve.

Our document was suppressed. We sent it for inclusion in the pre-discussion bulletin twice. As each issue of the bulletin came out we nervously and excitedly awaited its publication. The first time it was claimed that they lost it, the second time that pretense disappeared. Suddenly three comrades from Toronto moved to Winnipeg. If ever there was a recipe for creating a faction where none previously existed, the LSA leadership, were great chefs. The methodology they were employing we began to describe as bureaucratic centralism (Stalinism).

Once you begin to believe that the leadership of a Trotskyist organization has degenerated into a Stalinist clique, you begin to plot their demise. We became a faction. How I remember the sadness of that discussion in Winnipeg. At least I was sad.

Three "thousand mile stares" arrived in our midst. We were so paranoid of these comrades that we persecuted them. We refused to behave in a

comradely manner toward them and really try to convince them of the correctness of our position. This is something I have been ashamed of for almost thirty years. Our methodology began to parallel that of the leadership. We believed all of our own bullshit and "all out" factional warfare raged at every branch meeting. Once you become a faction you have to meet to plan your approach, then you have to meet to implement your approach. At one point I was the LSA branch organizer, the faction organizer, an executive member etc etc. It became nine internal meetings a week. Our real political work, was washed away in a sea of fratricide.

We began to circulate our document independently within the organization across the country. A number of comrades stood up and saluted, including Arnie. Unbeknown to us in Winnipeg, a number of comrades in Toronto, along with part of the leadership in the Montreal Branch, was also in the process of forming a faction in line with the majority tendency within the International organization. The American (SWP) and the Canadian sections were aligned with the minority. When our document arrived, these comrades who agreed with us on the national question, decided that we were potential allies.

Here we were in Winnipeg, a grouping of self described and very pissed off Cannonists, jumping into bed, without really looking, with comrades whose entire politics we had not examined. They were against the LSA leadership and so were we and that essentially was enough. Besides, being aligned with the European leadership was really sexy. We adapted to their politics the same way that the LSA leadership had embraced nationalism, by osmosis. I'm not discussing here whether the European comrades were right or wrong on various issues, what I'm talking about is the adaptation to their political line for the sake of winning the factional war and wiping out the LSA leadership.

Right across the country comrades began to align with the new united faction. Anybody who was pissed off about anything joined in the fight. It was a really diverse group. There were the European-a-philes especially the comrades from Quebec. There were trade union comrades who believed that more emphasis needed to be placed

directly within the labour movement especially in contrast to the student work, some fools might describe these comrades as workerists. There were a group of very able intellectuals who had skill in writing theoretical treatises. There were old left red diaper babies like myself that had been attracted by a combination of the Cuban revolution and the anti-war movement and had joined the LSA before the advent of the Vietnam War and the New Left. There were academics and dope smoking hippies and iconoclasts of every description. All in all in was the perfect sociological make-up for a factional war. Were we united by programmatic clarity? The answer is a resounding no. This became really apparent later, once we were outside of the LSA.

The LSA leadership then split into two factions. The supposed issue dividing the old leadership was the national question. The issues that really divided the leadership were multiple with personal ambition being near the top of the pile. The LSA was lead for many years by Ross Dowson, a remarkable and dedicated revolutionary of the old school. When nearly everybody on the left rejected Trotskyism, Dowson alone stood the test. There simply would have been no organization in Canada without his work. He spent many years trying to train a new leadership, consciously encouraging young people to take a leading role. I have lots of criticisms of Dowson, especially his political positions on the national question and on the nature of Social Democracy, but being a good red is not one of them.

My subjective view of this is that the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. didn't politically like Ross Dowson's turn to Canadian nationalism and instigated a rebellion by the young Turks in the Canadian leadership. The leadership of the SWP had recently passed on a generational basis. The SWP leadership encouraged their sycophants in the leadership of the Canadian section to stage a surprise coup d'état in the Political Committee and they deposed Dowson. What also became really clear at this point is that the group of young Turks, who had been minding the store while Dowson was away in Europe, had been running the show for some time. Our problems in Winnipeg with the national office had not been with Dowson, but with the young Turks. In my retrospective view, had Dowson been in control, our

documents would have been published and a principled discussion would likely have taken place. Whatever his differences with comrades, I never knew Dowson to back away from a fight or to act in an unprincipled manner.

A few years after all of the events described in this narrative, Dowson spent a couple of days staying with me while attending a Marxist conference in Winnipeg. I had known him since I was fifteen and that visit marked the first time I talked in detail with him as a mature adult. His total disappointment in what transpired was hard for him to disguise. He never whined, he was too tough a cookie for that, but his life's work blew up in his face and it affected him deeply.

Dowson's Brutus in the LSA was John Riddell. More than anybody else Riddell supposedly embodied the new generation of leadership. He had the air of an intellectual. He was well spoken, well dressed, could write well and worked hard for the organization. He had been active since his youth in the organization and to give him some credit, he had sacrificed a lot to be in the organization. Before the internal war started I once participated in a meeting with him that was confidential. The meeting was held at his mom's house in Rosedale, a very wealthy neighbourhood in Toronto. As a working class kid I had never been in a home like this before, it left a lasting impression. I suppose that the truth is that "you can take a boy out of Rosedale, but can you take Rosedale out of the boy"?

The three comrades sent out to Winnipeg went from being pro Canadian Nationalism to being anti-nationalist in the drop of a hat. One week they presented the previously united leaderships political resolution, which was pro nationalist at a branch meeting and a week later, they had, without discussion and without a new draft of a political resolution, on the basis of a phone call, changed their line. In Winnipeg, this further enraged the situation. Our definition of them as dumb and mindless Stalinoids seemed all the more real.

Ross Dowson was no wilting flower. He had been almost single handedly, both the continuity and the renaissance of Trotskyism in

Canada from the end of WW11, through McCarthyism, until the day of the coup. He gathered his supporters, formed a faction and began to fight. It became a three-ring circus.

Parallel to the discussion within the organization, two groupings in Toronto were moving toward Trotskyism independently of the LSA. The Old Mole and the Red Circle. The comrades in Toronto began to work directly with these groups with the intent of splitting the LSA and setting up a "real" section of the FI. These comrades were also very attracted by the sexiness of the European sections. The Europeans themselves were following this discussion blow by blow and even occasionally slipped one of their factional warriors into the country in order to offer advice and encouragement. Some of the Red Circle comrades joined the LSA to assist in the faction fight and we moved toward the convention. When the comrades outside of Toronto agreed to this split scenario, we had completed the transition from loyal tendency to disloyal faction intent on wrecking the LSA and setting up a new and better and more democratic and more revolutionary organization. This transition had taken only about six months. We had come a long way in a very short time.

The convention came. We drove the thirteen hundred miles to the convention. I remember the car ride well because almost all the shit house songwriters in the organization were in that car and we composed a three hundred-verse song. Each verse was an individual character assassination of somebody in the leadership or in their tendency. There were the three factions and nobody gave an inch. Nobody won, nobody lost, we all just followed the script. Many of the sociological phenomena present in a civil war existed at the convention. Old friends refused to talk to each other, civility didn't dwell at the LSA convention. Tendencies had become factions, nothing could be settled and peace could not be made. Dowson's group was the smallest and many of the older comrades were part of it and despite the political distance between us on the national question, there was no real hatred between us, we both focused on the SWP minions.

A few weeks later we staged a public meeting in Winnipeg where we

put forward the "armed struggle" line of the FI majority on Latin America. We intended to force the LSA leadership to expel us rather than simply splitting off. We wanted to be expelled for presenting the majority line so that we could claim that it was the LSA leadership that was in violation of international democratic centralism. We wanted to establish the new organization. The new LSA leadership accommodated us nicely. The "trial" was held at the Winnipeg LSA office, we arrived singing, led by Murray Smith, the Bugs Bunny song "Overture"

Overture, cut the lights
This is it, night of nights
No more rehearsing and playing the part
We know every part by heart

We got the boot.

All of the equipment in the office belonged to us and when we got the boot we stood up and began to take our stuff. A struggle over property ensued. Imagine a struggle over property between communists. It only lasted a minute as mostly the furniture had come from Murray's basement. But John Riddell initially attempted to bar the door. There was a moment that I've never forgotten. John was standing in front of the door; I was the first wanting to leave. Despite the fact that we had consciously engineered our own expulsion, I was really angry at the whole turn of events. Fundamentally my guts rebelled at the whole damn thing. Riddell was the focal point of my anger. I said to him very quietly, "John, move out of the way", to this day I'm grateful that he did because if he hadn't, I would have punched out his lights. I was standing there visualizing where in his face I would pound him, my fist was clenched at my side, I really wanted to hit the asshole. The idea of hitting a comrade, or anybody on the revolutionary left, is offensive to me, but there right in front of me, was the leading architect of the degeneration and destruction of the LSA, it came close.

If in this narrative, I have been unclear, let me be entirely forthcoming. I entirely believed in the LSA that I helped build. Like a number of

comrades, Arnie Mintz being a worthy example, I had spent most of my conscious life trying to build an effective political organization capable of winning a political and social revolution. Getting the boot was a blow defining much of my political work of the previous decade, as a waste of time. I never had entered politics with any other perspective than that we were going to win. Any other view I had no time for. Being active in revolutionary politics is far to consuming and the sacrifices are far to great to really be able to tolerate stupidity, personal ambition to "be a leader", power mongering, cynicism or historical pessimism.

The LSA office was located in the oldest office building in Winnipeg, the McIntyre Block located right at Portage and Main. It was a beautiful beater of a building long since demolished. It also had the cheapest rent in Winnipeg. A few days earlier, confident that we were going to be expelled, we had rented a new office right in front of the circular stairway two floors down from the LSA office. After 5 P.M. the elevator operator went home so Riddell and the three stooges were forced to walk by our office on the way out. When we took our stuff, we just walked down two flights and dropped the stuff into our new office. We also had bought a few cases of beer and invited our entire periphery and much of the Winnipeg left to a party celebrating the formation of a new organization. Free beer is a hell of an attraction and everybody showed up. We hand painted a sign which said "REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST ALLIANCE" which we attached to the front door, When Riddell and company came down the stairs we gave them the raspberry. We had now mastered the art of revolutionary pettiness.

Our expulsion was the signal across the country.

New branches were formed. The organization, which had existed within and without the LSA, became public. It became the Revolutionary Marxist Group (RMG\GMR). Eighteen month's of factional warfare had come to an end, or so I thought. It was time to do political work and build the party.

I had high hopes for the life of the RMG. It was a new beginning and the possibilities were evident. Walter Davis moved to Winnipeg, he had been a leader of the Toronto group and a solid force during the factional war. We were glad to have him. I was especially glad. I thought highly of the man and the war had taken a lot out of me. We needed some fresh blood in Winnipeg, some new ideas and approaches to even the most mundane tasks. I looked forward to working politically and to recruiting new folks to the org.

Because it was a new formation we needed to settle the issues of policy and leadership. Almost immediately after the split we entered into a pre-convention discussion in order to settle the questions of line and orientation. I was really uncomfortable about going this hastily into a convention. I argued alone in the Winnipeg branch against having a convention quickly, I convinced nobody. My thinking was that it would be better to let the comrades do real work again, have some decent experience and then begin the discussion based on real life. Even the comrades I was the closest to politically thought I was wrong.

The sociological makeup of the group that formed the RMG was perfect when a faction fight was the order of the day. Party building was another matter. What we had accomplished during the fight in the LSA was to train a whole group of comrades in the art of factional warfare and not to train them as organizers and agitators. We were fucked.

The RMG immediately formed two camps and while the level of hatred never reached even a proportion of what had happened in the LSA, with certain comrades it was like watching the gears shift comfortably into place. Out came the pen and ink and out came another round of bullshit. I voted for the document that was closest to my instincts but I did so without enthusiasm and I didn't go to the convention. I didn't realize it at the time but, I was quite beat-up by the process and what I needed was inspiration not internal war. I began to pull away from the RMG. Not so much politically as personally. It wasn't long before I involved myself in the folk festival and the comrades noticed my absence pretty quickly. I left the organization but maintained good

relations.

A year and a bit later I rejoined by instinct just as the RMG and the LSA decided that the split was stupid and we should get together. I only stayed briefly. Not long after I left for good they split apart again for good. After I left a number of the Winnipeg comrades and my old pal Arnie split off and joined the Sparticist League. They had been secretly plotting with Jim Robertson and the Sparticists in New York. The next time and the last time I saw Arnie he was selling the Sparticist paper outside of a political meeting I attended in Toronto while visiting there. I went up to him to say hello and was met with a sectarian rant. Not a drop of the old humour, not the same person at all. It was fucking awful.

One of the most interesting aspects of the splits, re-groupments and splits is that with each action, each of the component parts got smaller. The LSA and RMG merger created an organization that was considerably smaller than the LSA was when the convention discussion began. After the next split each component got even smaller. In time the RMG grouping declined and split again creating what is now called Socialist Action. The LSA grouping became the Communist League and abandoned Trotsky and Trotskyism and embraced Castro and Mandela as the pillars of human progress. Its really interesting that the grouping that few years earlier we were castigating as methodological Stalinists, subscribed to two neo-Stalinists as the new messiahs. Makes ya wonder, eh.

For the last pile of years I have belonged to a wonderful, democratic centralist organization, the MPCP, that is the Mitch Podolak Communist Party. It has no meetings and has the correct line on every question. There have been short term United Front efforts that have worked out real well particularly during the May Day anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. We organized the largest May Day march I have ever seen. I assisted in the formation of the Winnipeg Labor Choir, which played at the evening social of that strike celebration. With the demise of the Soviet Union the level of sectarianism between

factions of the left in Winnipeg has almost disappeared. Almost every view within the left participated in that May Day without rancor and with comradely cooperation. I was amazed. I hosted the evening show and very consciously pointed out the different tendencies in the audience to everybody in the audience, "look who is here" I said. It was a neat moment, everybody cheered.

I like Socialist Action. I really like the press and I know that this small and confident group is doing the work of keeping Trotskyism alive within the Canadian State. Whatever I think about SA, they are in the great scheme of things, quite insignificant in the body politic even of the left. In a way they reflect the true state of the far left in Canada. When they started, with the old RMG grouping splitting apart, it was not over politics. The leading comrades in the SA explained this to me at the time. It was a personality struggle between comrades. A power struggle over an anthill. These "struggles" supposedly over direction and line, in this period, disguise badly the real problems of applying Leninism to the operations of a minute sect.

In my view, there are four consequential factors that have derailed Trotskyism and the far left as a force in North America. The first is temporarily beyond our control and that is the victory of the counter-revolution in Europe and the freedom that defeat allowed Imperialism. US capitalism only wants partners or compredores. Even bourgeois elements that want some independent financial action get crushed. Witness the national bourgeois in Iraq, the demonization of Hussein, and the stupid bastards only wanted their piece of the action.

The second is the ability of the bourgeoisie to control, through the use of mass media, the thinking process of most workers. Television is the opiate. The tube has surpassed religion as the opiate of the masses, while still a serious factor, religion plays second fiddle. Television delivers the lies directly into the homes of the working class. George Bush was able to label Hussein as Hitler and then go commit genocide on the people of Baghdad. The working class believed the bullshit and tied yellow ribbons around trees and lampposts when the soldiers came home. In WW1 the propaganda showed German soldiers bayoneting

babies in order to motivate the American soldiers, in the Gulf adventure off they went to kill the new Hitler. Working class soldiers killing working class civilians so that the capitalist class could smack their uppity minion and make big bucks for the war industry. Almost everybody bought the bullshit and is still buying it.

The third is something we could control if we had a mind to. It is the incredibly "mechanistic" application of Leninism that has dominated all the Trotskyist organizations in North America since 1938. Currently, we are not engaged in a civil war with the Whites. When push comes to shove we will need a highly disciplined, highly motivated and entirely united organization. In the process of building toward that eventuality, we have to understand that both discipline and motivation are learned traits. It is permissible to make mistakes without being labeled as an enemy of Leninism and of the working class. Party building, developing the line, the application of politics, the art of politics is a living process, the dialectic, the argument, is in play. Party building is likely more an organic process than is the application of a rigid North American definition of democratic centralism. Trail and error perhaps can build a truly democratic centralist party. The last six decades have clearly demonstrated what the mechanistic application of mythological Russian formulas has done for us.

The bottom line for me is the following. REAL LENINISTS DON'T SPLIT. What we have now is bupkas.

In the last few years I abandoned my traditional Ludditeism and learned how to use a computer. When I finally got on line last year I studiously searched the web for Trotskyism. It was more disheartening than enlightening. There are hundreds of different grouplet\sects out there all invoking the name of Trotsky, who is probably spinning in his grave in thorough disgust. The stuff you find is amazing. The former Sparticist League has a site and in their first paragraph of self-description they attack Pabloism even before they attack capitalism. Thirty-five years since they split from the SWP and they are still talking about the joy of splitting from the SWP. It appears to be their reason for existence. The reality is who gives a shit. There are more

groups with reasons for not getting together than there are hairs on a jackass. Comrades, the enemy was never Pablo or Healy or Jim Robertson or Riddell or Jack Barnes. The enemy is the capitalist class. The only time it is possible to define a working class political tendency as an enemy is when they cross the class line as in the Popular Front in Spain. A political alliance with the enemy is the big shit. This is the difference between Stalinists and us.

My mom used to talk about my Uncle Harry, an anarchist by inclination. Harry used to go back and forth between the various tendencies on the left in the late thirties and talk working class unity. Everybody hated Harry because everybody he was talking about didn't fit into the line of his or her sect. Harry the anarchist was more right than he was wrong. What we need to apply between us Trots we also need to apply to broader sections of the left.

The fourth and unfortunately the most immediate ingredient is the megalo-fucking-mania of too many of our comrades. We to often attract the alienated, the lost and the disassociated. I often think of the Statue of Liberty with the " bring me your huddled masses" and compare it to our movement with its "bring me your loonies, losers and lost". We provide often a framework, an infrastructure for them to flourish. We provide a rigid definition of democratic centralism in which they can sublimate their fantasies of being the next Trotsky or Lenin. The rigidity of the definition and the application creates the room to argue for argument sake, without the benefit of real political work in the class. To often, it is this element that leads both majority and minority groups in Trotskyist formations.

Real leadership is tied to real struggle. Faction fighting can in no way be equated to the struggle. Leadership needs to be earned and needs to be trained and hardened in real political work not at the typewriter. The concept of 'publish or perish" belongs with the academics and not with us. That the infinitesimal differences over line, break us apart, instead of us allowing room for real life to show us where to go, is the real crime against Leninism and the working class. A specter is haunting us, it the specter of megalomania and sectarianism.

We have pretty much forgotten how to do basic Socialist propaganda. Remember the working class vs. the bourgeoisie. All of us against the few of them. They are in total control of the means of dissemination. We need to find a 21st century methodology to combat their horse shit. We need to learn new tricks and approaches to getting our ideas out on a mass basis. We don't have the resources that they do but both the Battle for Seattle and the recent cyber attack on the net gives me hope that just below the surface, a cauldron is boiling. What we have to figure out is how do we harness the steam. For sure, we should do it together.

That's it. I started writing this to honour Arnie Mintz, my old friend and comrade and to assuage my guilt for not having seen him for so long. That all of this came out of my brain really surprised me. I'm not a theory person, never was and never will be. I guess Arnie dying really blew me away.

In 1995 Lyons and myself took a trip east together and we ran into Stew at a Left Caucus meeting of the Ontario NDP. Stew told me about Arnie being laid low with MS. I never went to see him because I remembered the last time I had seen him. Without a doubt, the working partnership we had in Winnipeg was amongst the best experience I ever had. That Arnie is dead without us yet winning a socialist society or even having a good shot at it, is the real tragedy. Arnie was a relentless fighter and whatever our differences, I am proud to be on the same side that he was.

(by H. H.)

IN COMMEMORATION OF PAT BRAIN

It was 8:30 in the morning on an icy winter day in December, 1959 at the corner of Oakwood and St. Clair in downtown Toronto, Ontario. A freezing 24-year old man stood outside the walkway leading to the stairs into Oakwood Collegiate Institute selling copies of the *Young Socialist* to students rushing to start their classes in their homerooms. Most students walked by quickly. But one 12-year old student stopped to chat. He greeted the man enthusiastically. After a brief and lively exchange, the student purchased the paper for ten cents and rushed on to his class.

That 12-year old boy is now the author of this recollection. It is being written in memory of the 24-year old young man handing out those socialist papers, Pat Brain.

Pat Brain, who died on January 25, 2016, at the age of 81 was born into what must have been unimaginable poverty on November 3, 1935 in the iconic industrial slums of Aston, Birmingham. Many of the workingclass and the poor lived in substandard back-to-back houses surrounding dingy, unhygienic courtyards, sometimes without indoor water or toilet facilities in their homes. Bob Raphael, in his memoir" of the time that he was in the League for Socialist Action, wrote of Pat as follows: "He was, I think, genuinely from a disadvantaged background in England. His chest was sunken—one suspected he had been poorly nourished as a child. (This is Toronto in 1960 and not Dickens in the 19th century, I hasten to remark). Pat had not had much formal education and this may have affected the way he spoke which could make him seem a bit strange…that is, until, one listened to what Pat had to say…".

Pat had pneumonia when he was two or three years old. He went to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School where the head teacher anticipated great things from this gregarious and adventurous student. According to his son, Anthony, Pat as a young child "inspired the Birmingham civilian population to ease the psychological terror of Nazi bombing" with his fine tenor singing voice. Birmingham was the second-heaviest English city to be bombed with 2,200 killed in the German air raids. He left school at an early age to earn a living. He had only primitive reading and writing skills when he got a job in a factory.

Pat's restless nature imbued him with a yearning for a change of scenery. He saved his money and landed in Toronto on his 21st birthday in 1956—a new life lay ahead of him.

Pat lived in a rented flat, possibly on Church Street in downtown Toronto above a storefront meeting place maintained by the Socialist Labour Party, a sectarian group of Marxists originating in Toronto's German immigrant community. He soon met Harry Paine, a comrade who had immigrated a few years earlier from Belfast, who was a co-worker at the English Electric Plant where he was able to get work in the steel-finishing industry.

Ernie Tate, in his memoir, speaks about meeting Pat Brain while he was working in the same plant in Toronto. "He had recently come over from Birmingham, England, and had such a strong accent I at first had a difficult time understanding him. He became

active in the union and soon took a keen interest in our group [the Socialist Educational League], joining immediately and becoming one of its leading activists and was part of our youth organization [the Young Socialists] a few years later."

Pat Brain was not shy. He loved to tell stories and laugh heartily and could be eloquent and assertive with incisive logic when needed. He always spoke with an infectious, even agitated enthusiasm, punctuated with humour. Over the next five years, he learned to read and write taking personal lessons from the group leader, Ross Dowson.

One of the early experiences Pat Brain had after joining the Socialist Educational League in Toronto was participating in the "Trailblazer Tours" selling the Workers Vanguard at plant gates and subscriptions door to door and meeting with subscribers and political contacts from Sydney, Nova Scotia to the Prairies and across to the Pacific Coast. During this time, Pat was influenced by other comrades who were part of the Toronto branch of the Socialist Educational League including Ross Dowson, Ernie Tate, Cliff Orchard, Harry Paine, John Darling, Hugh Dowson, George Bryant, Pat Mitchell, Myer Shapiro, Ken Sutherland, Vic Hugh and Helen Olson. He loved to tell stories about his adventures on the tours where he often played a conciliatory role in mediating personal conflicts arising from living in close quarters for months.

Pat Brain was the quintessential activist, attending all meetings, carefully listening, reading voraciously and speaking out boldly to share his insights. He attempted to

sway his Communist Party-led union, the Electrical Workers to orient to the Canadian Labour Congress and the NDP. He found time between jobs and work shifts to do what some derisively called "joe-jobs", distributing our paper, knocking on doors and handing out leaflets at meetings. He was most exhilarated when speaking at union meetings or sharing an insight into a political issue with a new "contact".

He was present at most Vanguard Forums that we held Friday nights at our meetings where we dissected the current events of the times. He took great joy in ideas, listened attentively to our regular "educationals" at our internal weekly meetings and laughed easily and often.

He befriended me after the Socialist Educational League decided to organize a Young Socialists group which was its independent youth section. He was one of the founding members of the "youth section" and enthusiastically sold copies at high schools in Toronto of the *Young Socialist*, a paper published by our co-thinkers in the U.S., the Young Socialist Alliance. Through his total commitment to the movement during this period, Pat was the exemplar of a cadre, not only as a party-builder, to use James P. Cannon's term, but to its norms of discipline and democracy. He also had an uncanny and recognized ability to read mass moods.

There was a tradition in the movement to have its members relocate to parts of the country where we could recruit members and form branches. At its height, we had functional groups or members-at-large in over 20 cities and towns across Canada. Pat

was there from the beginning of our growth from the low point of the mid-1950s. He was deeply inspired by the cross-country spread of the movement as well as the mass union militancy and mobilizations he witnessed in Toronto in the late 1950s and especially in the mid-sixties. He was inspired by the rapid growth of the anti-Vietnam war movement in which we played a leading role through the Vietnam Mobilization Committee in Toronto.

We also encouraged our comrades, many of whom were immigrants to Canada, especially from other parts of the British Commonwealth, to return to their own countries to help build their own sections of the Fourth International. It was in the early 1960s that Pat Brain decided, along with other comrades in Toronto, to return to Great Britain. His old comrade from English Electric, Ernie Tate, left for London, England at about the same time along with several other Toronto-based comrades, including Alan Harris, Jim Clough, Toni Foster and Frank Gordon. They were all excited about the prospect of a great adventure in British politics. The reunification of the Fourth International in 1963 meant that the movement in England could get a positive boost from an influx of young cadres. As it turned out, the comrades from Canada did play an exemplary role in the London branch of the International Marxist group as it grew rapidly during the deepening youth and student radicalization in the 1960s.